'Trishna' yacht is close to midway

By Samir Pal

"TRISHNA" — the Indian Army Engineers' yacht now sailing around the world has reached close to the half way point—Panama Canal. The 37 ft. long Swan class sail boat with six dedicated crew members on board, is now in the Carribean Sea between Barbados and Jamaica, from where it will set course for Panama.

Communications to New Delhi have been possible whenever the boat comes within range of coastal very high frequency (VHF) radio telephone stations that can link up with international satellite systems.

According to the latest communication, the yacht encountered a storm before reaching Barbados from Port of Spain in Trinidad.

The yacht encountered head winds upto 40 knots that tore the fore sail while the billowing main sail burst at the seams. The boats speed log and depth sounder became non-functional.

But the crew headed by Maj K. S. Rao sounded cheerful. "We have enjoyed cooking Indian food on board, especially fresh vegetables, which we picked up from Port of Spain. The preservative in some of the tinned food does taste a bit odd at times. There has been no major illness on board so far."

"Trishna" had encountered another storm while rounding Cape Agulhas—sourthern most tip of the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa on Nov. 18.

According to sailers, the Cape of Good Hope was so named because through centuries it had been known as the Cape of Storms. While rounding it sailers keep hoping that the weather would be good. "Thank God we made it", the message came over the voice link to New Delhi, after passing this point.

This actually was the second storm after sailing out from Bombay on Sept 28.

The first was after leaving Madagascar on Nov 12 and 13 when their countrymen were celebrating Diwali. The yacht virtually went under three mas-

This narrative of the world sailing expedition based on the experiences of the crew has been pieced together mainly from radio telephone conversations with their base, conducted through satellite voice channels.

sive waves, but managed to remain afloat. The position of the yacht at that time was just past the south of Durban.

The captain of the yacht Maj K. S. Rao reported later from Saint Helena, "the sea was white and ferocious, with strong winds right upto Nov 14."

They took advantage of the strong Agulhas Current near the South African coast and rounded Cape Agulhas.

"We thought we were one of the lucky ones to have rounded the Cape of Good Hope without any storms or gales" said Maj A. K. Singh—who looks after the electrical and mechanical systems—during the telephone conversation from Saint Helena with Col T. P. S. Chowdhury, the Team Manager in New Delhi.

But that was not to be. As soon as "Trishna" rounded Cape Agulhas the weather changed for the worse. Narrating their experience later, the crew reported: "Gales 40-50 knots with waves over 30 feet high hit us. Many waves broke over our boat, drenching all of us, and filling our cockpit with tons of water. The 18 hours of the storm seemed endless for all of us".

The crew members were quite exhausted. Capt S. Shekhar—who looks after food and medicines on board—reported: "we could barely eat anything on November 18 and 19 except chocolates and biscuits. Even making tea or heating tinned food was a big problem on board. Many of us felt seasick. We tried the homeopthic medicines for sea sickness especially prepared by Lt Gen R. P. Singh. They were very effective and we were very grateful to him."

The Yacht caught excellent south east trade winds that took it to St. Helena island in the Atlantic Ocean on December 2. At times the "Trishna" did almost 160 nautical miles per day, making her the first Indian yacht to sail non-stop for 33 days after setting out from Mauritius on October 30. The crew believe, their sailboat could be the first of its kind to go round the Cape of Good Hope since India's sea faring days under sail.

En route the crew saw rich sea life. They encountered seals, dolphins, plenty of fish, ducks, albatross and other sea birds. They almost ran into a huge whale, 40 feet in length with a 10 feet fin, which accompanied them for almost 8 hours keeping barely 100 metres away.

At St. Helena Island, they had a well-deserved rest for seven days, during which they checked their yacht, carried out repairs, rectified their radio set and antennas and re-stocked their yacht. After talking to their families on the telephone and writing letters to their friends, they left St. Helena in the evening of Dec. 9 for Ascension Island.

The sail to Ascension Island was a comfortable one, with the yacht doing an average speed of six knots. They reached Ascension Island in the early hours of Dec. 15 and after a brief stopover to take in mail, water and fresh provisions, they sailed off for Natal in Brazil on Dec. 17. From Natal they sailed on to Belem in Brazil.

They met the local Indian population at Natal and Belem, who looked after the crew well. In fact Maj. K. S. Rao talked to New Delhi from the residence of an Indian doctor, Dr Verma in Belem, where they were having dinner. The Indian Ambassador at Brazil, Air Chief Marshal Dilbagh Singh, had made good arrangements for them at Natal and Belem. The Brazilian Navy too looked after the crew well.

"Trishna" then called at the Port of Georgetown in Guyana and from there sailed on to Port of Spain in Trinidad. According to messages received from them, they enjoyed the hospitality of the Indian and local population at Georgetown and Port of Spain. The crew joined in the Republic Day celebrations by the Indian Embassy staff at Georgetown.

Talking about their experience for the benefit of sailing buffs back in India, Maj. A. P. Singh reported: "Navigation in the West Indies is very interesting but can be dangerous at times, especially at night. Sailing along the east coast of South America has been quite a contrast to our sailing in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans".